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SRIKANTH, LAKSHYA STRIKE MEDALS

Kidambi Srikanth and Lakshya Sen assure country of two medals, it's the first time that men will win two medals in World Championships. One of Lakshya or Srikanth will be in the final on Sunday after setting up an all-India semifinal on Saturday. Lakshya, considered India's 'next big thing' in the sport, saved a match point to reach the last four on his debut. However, defending women's champion, PV Sindhu, lost in her quarterfinal against Tai Tzu Ying | P19

UK Covid spike would translate to 14L cases a day in India, warns govt

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

WARNING that the number of daily Covid-19 cases being reported from the UK and France could translate to 13-14 lakh cases in proportion to India's population, top government authorities on Friday sought a fresh reset of measures to keep infections under control. During the peak of the Delta wave in early May, India had reported over 4 lakh cases daily before the numbers dipped.

The UK on Friday reported over 93,000 fresh cases, while in France this number was above 65,000. Denmark and Norway, too, are reporting a massive surge in daily infections after Omicron fuelled the wave. Worryingly, these spikes are being reported despite a high coverage of Covid vaccinations and history of previous major waves, driven by Delta.

V K Paul, member (health) Niti Aayog and head of India's national Covid-19 task force, said that even though hospitalisations in Europe so far are low and there is no pressure on the health infrastructure, the situation is dynamic. "We have to be ready to face such a situation with such high numbers. Cold weather also leads to the breeding of the virus. Cases surge overnight and it becomes serious. Though the situation is stable, we must be cautious," he said.

Citing a WHO advisory, authorities urged people not to dismiss off Omicron cases as mild as the evidence is still emerging. So far, 101 Omicron cases have been confirmed from 11 states in India with the highest, 32, in Maharashtra alone. Lav Agarwal, joint secretary in the health ministry, said most of the cases have been confirmed either in people with direct history of international travel or their contacts, adding the evidence of its community transmission in India is low. ICMR head Balram Bhargava urged people to avoid non-essential travel and mass gatherings and to observe low intensity festivities. P3,9,20

7 DAYS HQ FOR INT'L TRAVELLERS

BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta said all international travellers must remain in home quarantine for a week, irrespective of the country they are flying in from, and even if they carry a negative RT-PCR test report.

TAKE YOUR SHOT

Dec 16 62,90,272 doses

Dec 17 55,98,939 doses

TOTAL: 145,08,60,510

NATIONWIDE	DEC 16	DEC 17
Fresh cases	7,974	7,447
Recoveries	7,948	7,886
Deaths	343	391

KARNATAKA	DEC 16	DEC 17
Fresh cases	303	238
Recoveries	322	317
Deaths	2	3

Blow to Amazon as competition body suspends 2019 Future deal

Slaps ₹202 cr fine on the US firm for concealing info; asks it to apply afresh for nod

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

IN a big setback to Amazon, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Friday cancelled the approval it had given to the e-commerce major's acquisition of 49% stake in Future Coupons, a Future Group company, in 2019 and directed the US firm to apply afresh for clearance.

The anti-trust regulator also imposed a penalty of ₹202 crore on the e-tailer for "a deliberate design on the part of Amazon to suppress the actual scope and purpose of the deal".

While approving the deal in November 2019, the CCI had said the order would be revoked if, at any time, the information provided by the acquirer was found to be incorrect. The CCI reviewed its approval after several stakeholders, including an independent director of Future Retail and the Confederation of All India Traders, pointed out that the US behemoth had held back vital information. They submitted that Amazon had not disclosed its intention to take a strategic control over Future Retail, in which Future Coupons holds 9.82%.

Amazon had thwarted Future group's move to sell its retail business to Reliance Retail in a ₹24,000 crore deal by moving the Singapore International Arbitration Centre and getting a stay against the deal.

The CCI noted the intent disclosed by Amazon for seeking nod for acquisition of FCPL is different from what it disclosed before SIAC. The CCI also found Amazon had suppressed the fact that its deal with Future Coupons was "merely a vehicle to acquire interest over FRL".

According to legal experts, the CCI order makes Amazon's case in SIAC infructuous and, as a natural corollary, clears the path for the Reliance-Future deal.

Amazon said it was perusing the CCI order and would decide the future course of action soon, but sources hinted that the company would move court. However, Future Group insiders claimed Amazon can't move court since CCI had only kept its 2019 approval in abeyance and asked Amazon to apply for fresh nod.

WHAT NEXT

- If Amazon has to apply afresh for CCI approval, it will have to first get Future group's consent
- Future's consent out of question as it feels Amazon was using the deal as a proxy to gain strategic control over Future Retail
- Amazon may move court against the CCI order. But legal opinion is divided if it can do so since the CCI has only suspended its 2019 approval, not nixed it

Priyanka: What Ramesh said is indefensible

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

"I wholeheartedly condemn the statement made by KR Ramesh Kumar. It is inexplicable how anyone can ever utter such words. They are indefensible. Rape is a heinous crime. Full stop," said senior Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday, commenting on former Speaker and Congress MLA Ramesh Kumar's insensitive remark on the floor of the Assembly on Thursday.

Kumar, during a discussion on rain and flood devastation in the state on the floor of the Assembly on Thursday, said 'when rape is inevitable, one should lie down and enjoy it'. The issue echoed in the Lok Sabha too on Friday with Union Minister Smriti Irani saying Congress should first suspend Kumar before talking about women empowerment and raising slogans like "Ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon".

CONTINUED ON: P9

EXPRESS READ

Former Union minister Jalappa dies at 97

BENGALURU: Veteran Congress leader and former Union minister R L Jalappa died at a hospital in Kolar on Friday. He was 97 and was suffering from age-related ailments, including kidney and lung issues, family and R L Jalappa Hospital sources said. The veteran leader was under treatment in the ICU for some time now, they said, adding that he was also suffering from paralysis and a blood clot in the brain for which he underwent surgeries earlier this year. P4

Amarinder finalises poll pact with BJP

Captain Amarinder Singh on Friday formally announced an alliance with the BJP for the upcoming Punjab Assembly elections. The alliance between his Punjab Lok Congress and the BJP was clinched after seven rounds of talks, said BJP election in-charge for Punjab and Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. Punjab will now witness a four-cornered contest, the other big players being the Congress, AAP and the Shiromani Akali Dal | P10

Religion no bar for temple shop lease: SC

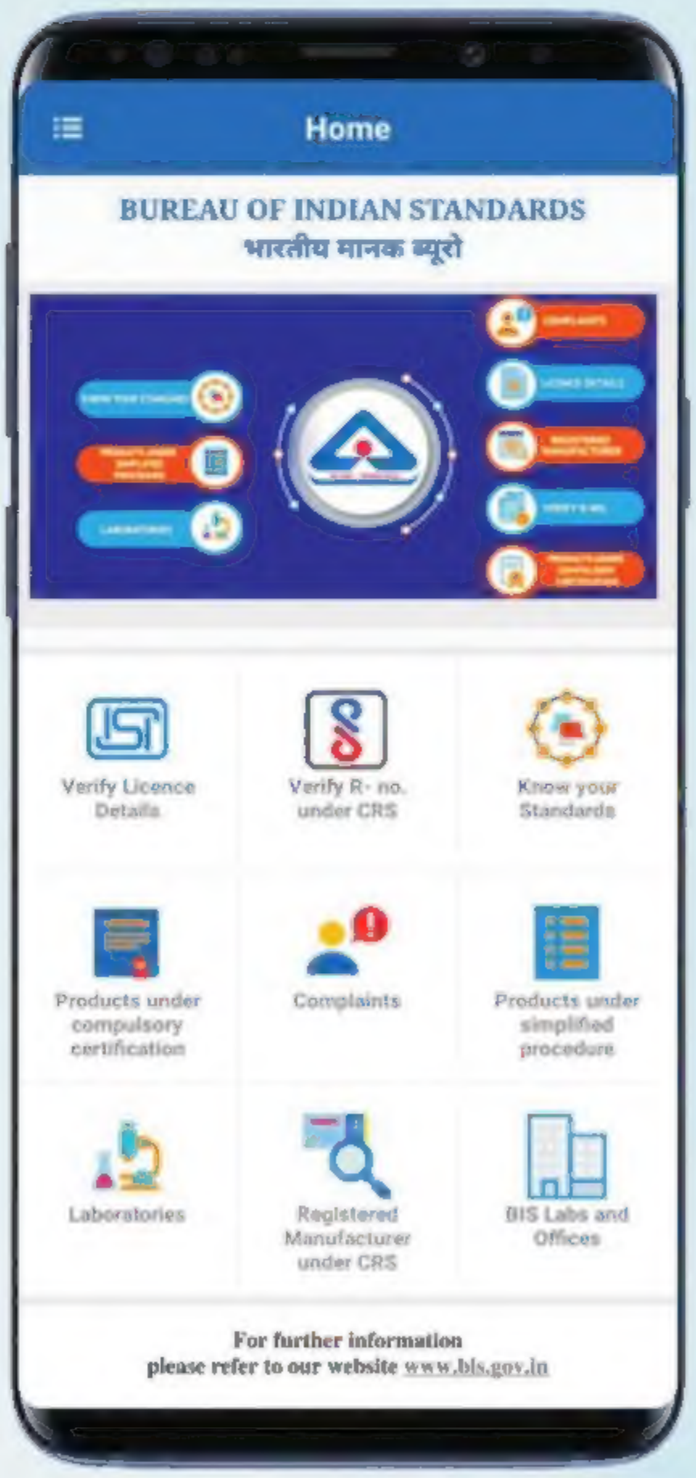
The Supreme Court on Friday permitted people from all faiths to participate in the auction of leases of shops in the Sri Bramaramamba Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple at Kurnool. "While it may be that within temple premises, one may not say something which would be offensive to the faith or that there may be no liquor or gambling, it cannot be that you will not sell bamboo, flowers or toys if you don't belong to the Hindu religion," Justice DY Chandrachud said | P5

Apex court stays Lokur panel inquiry

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the ongoing inquiry into Pegasus snooping by a panel led by former SC judge MB Lokur, set up by the Bengal government. On October 27, the SC had ordered the setting up of a three-member panel of cyber experts to probe the alleged use of Pegasus. Meanwhile, an analysis by digital forensics firm Arsenal Consulting revealed that activist Rona Wilson's smartphone was infiltrated using Pegasus a year before his arrest | P8

Embattled Ajay Mishra skips Modi's meet

Beleaguered Union minister Ajay Mishra on Friday skipped a meeting of BJP MPs from UP with PM Narendra Modi. It wasn't immediately clear whether he was directed to stay away. Mishra got into the Opposition cross-hairs after an SIT probing the Lakhimpur Kheri violence said it was pre-planned. His son Ashish is the prime accused in the case. For the third successive day, Parliament was paralysed as the Opposition pressed on for Mishra's resignation | P8



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